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Vance: Soviet Unit Has Been in Cuba for Years

Vance: Status Quo Unacceptable to U.S.

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Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance yesterday announced that a Soviet combat brigade has been secretly deployed in Cuba for several years, at least, and that the United States is demanding that something be done to correct the newly revealed situation.

In a news conference and a closed-door appearance before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Vance would not specify what the United States will demand from the Soviets to ease this newest cause of super-power discord. He suggested that, at a minimum, Washington is seeking a statement of the "purpose and intention" of the 2,000 to 3,000 heavily armed troops.

Asked whether Washington will insist on removal of the troops, Vance replied cautiously. "I will not be satisfied with maintenance of the status quo." Officials said the U.S. demand is being kept vague to create the maximum chance for successful negotiations with Moscow.

The United States took the matter to the Soviets late last week by calling Soviet Deputy Ambassador Vladilen M. Vasev to the State Department. Vasev returned to see Vance in an unannounced meeting yesterday, presumably with a preliminary reply from Moscow.

Intensive negotiations are expected to begin when Soviet Ambassador Anatoliy F. Dobrynin returns to Washington Friday. Dobrynin has been delayed in his return from home leave by the death of his father, sources said.

"We regard this as a very serious matter affecting our relations with the Soviet Union," Vance told reporters in a statement worked out at a meeting of top White House advisers late Tuesday.

He said the presence of the Soviet combat unit in Cuba "runs counter to long-held American policies," but said it was not covered by U.S.-Soviet understandings about Cuba in the Kennedy and Nixon administrations, and added that the brigade lacks the airlift or sealift to give it an "assault capability" against the United States.

A statement by Vance, speaking for the high councils of the Carter administration on this military and political hot potato, had been widely expected at yesterday's news conference. The most surprising part of his remarks, and the part that drew persistent questioning from reporters, was the claim that the Soviet troop unit has been in Cuba, undetected, since "at least the mid-1970s," before President Carter took office.

Senior officials were embarrassed and, by their account, surprised by intelligence confirming the Soviet combat force just as the Senate moves into the decisive phase of its debate on the strategic arms limitation treaty (SALT II).

Despite much skepticism by outsiders, the officials insisted that the timetable of the Soviet troop deployment had not been adjusted to predate the responsibility of the Carter administration, and they continued to deny that timing of the revelation about the troops was adjusted to embarrass Cuba during the current conference of non-aligned nations in Havana.

Vance said re-analysis of "fragmentary" intelligence in the light of new information suggested that elements of a Soviet brigade might even have been in Cuba since the early 1970s "and possibly before that."

Some officials suggested that the Soviet combat unit might even be a remnant of the forces sent to Cuba by Moscow before the 1962 U.S.-Soviet confrontation over strategic missiles on the island.

U.S. intelligence has known for many years that several thousand Soviet military men were present in

Cuba, but not in a combat role. The Russians have been assumed to be military trainers and advisers and operators of a very large and important communications interception station, according to officials.

By early 1976 at the latest, U.S. intelligence received indications that some of the Soviet troops in Cuba were organized as a combat unit, the sources said. There were additional "occasional references" to a Soviet brigade over the months since then, they added.

These indications and references, according to the official account, were inconclusive and were not taken at face value by the intelligence community as a whole.

A National Security Agency analyst who completed a retrospective study this June is credited with the conclusion that a Soviet brigade organization existed in Cuba, but not necessarily an active brigade with troops and equipment.

This finding set off higher priority intelligence-collection activities and an intensive review within the administration, officials said.

By mid-July several members of Congress had heard of the intelligence findings, and one of them, Sen. Richard Stone (D-Fla.), began raising a public alarm.

After considerable internal dissension, a top-level review in late July

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